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## LABOR'S STAND FOR FREE SCHOOLS

"The first awakening of American wage earners as a class did not occur until the late twenties (1820) . . . The cause of the awakening was economic and political inequalities between citizens of different classes, not primarily between employers and wage earners but between producers and consumers. Around two chief grievances, both closely related to their status as citizens of a democracy, the working men of this period rallied. First was the demand for leisure which furnishes the keynote of economic movement . . . Second

was the demand for the consideration of public education which furnished the keynote of the political movement. Charity schools were held to be incompatible with citizenship, for they degraded the workmen and failed to furnish them with the requisite training and information for consideration of public questions, thereby dooming them to become dupes of political demagogues . . . In 1829, public education took its place distinctly and definitely as the head of the list of measures urged by the Working Men's Party . . . And the candidates for the State Legislature (Pennsylvania) nominated by the Working Men's Party were pledged to favor a general system of state education."

JOHN R. COMMONS

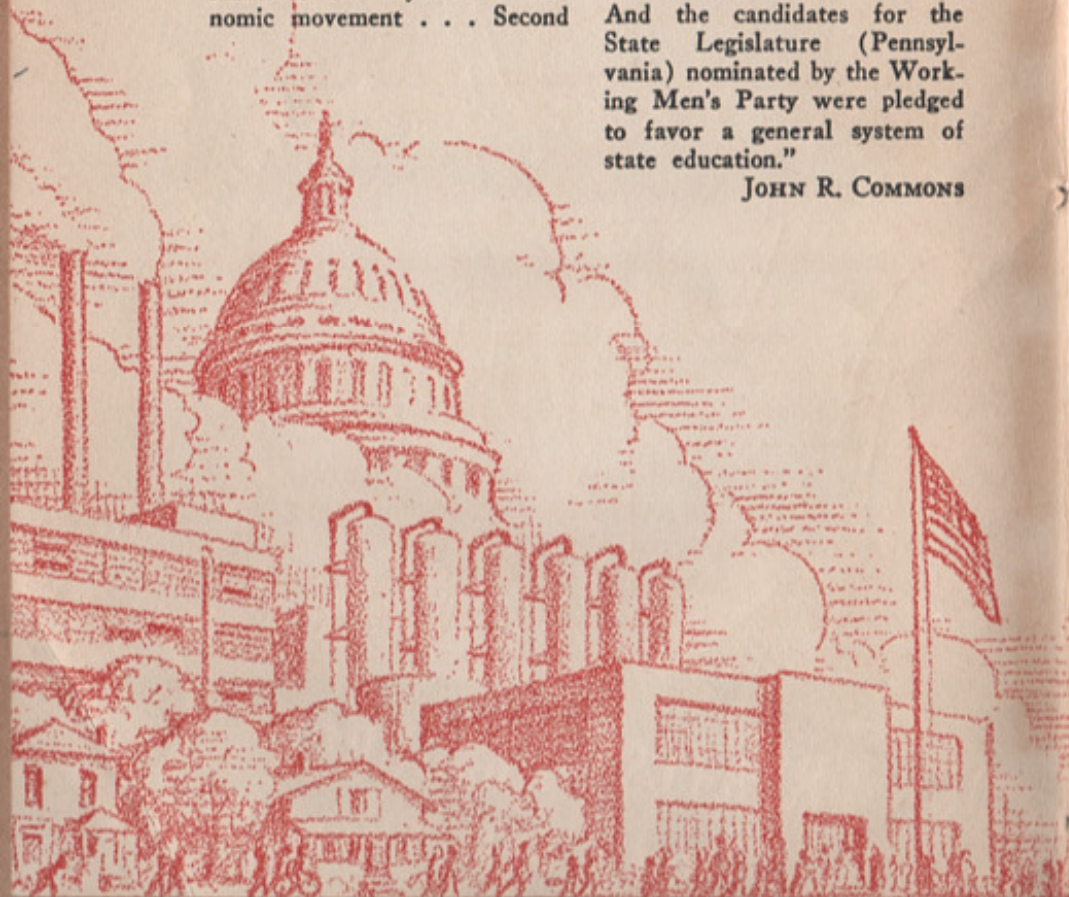
# LABOR AND EDUCATION

*Thomas Jefferson wrote, in a letter to James Madison: "Educate and inform the whole mass of people. They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of liberty."*

## Education for Democracy

The American labor movement has been the strongest organized force in support of free public schools. It has therefore also been a voice for the children of millions of unorganized workers and farmers. Today organized labor is in the forefront of the fight to extend equal educational opportunity to every boy and girl in the United States regardless of race, creed or color. Workers know the importance of "educating for democracy" and of building a public school system which will meet the needs of common people living in the twentieth century.

Our schools are doing their share in helping to win the war and the peace, but are doing it, unfortunately, under extreme handicaps. John W. Studebaker, U. S. Commissioner of Education, announced recently that during the past two years American schools have been responsible for the sale of \$300,000,000 worth of





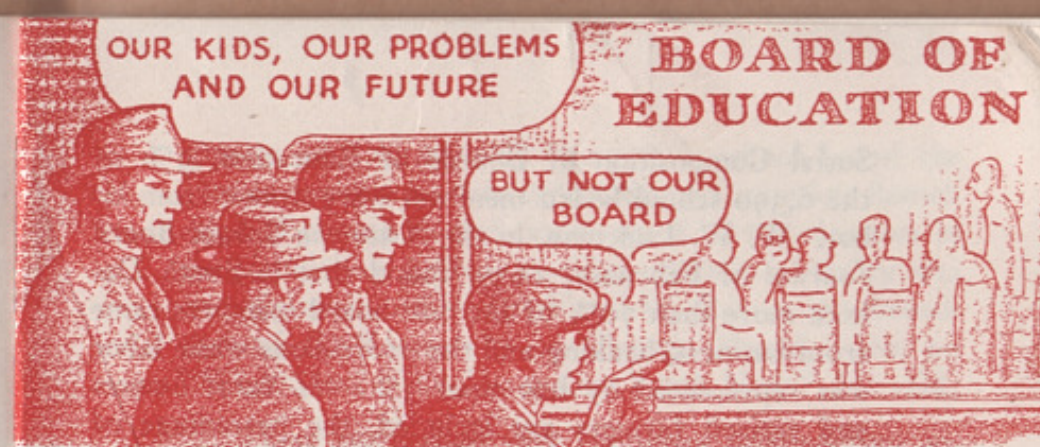
war bonds, the collection of approximately 1,500,000 tons of scrap, the cultivation of more than 1,000,000 victory gardens, the preparation of thousands of articles for the Red Cross, and the production of about 600,000 precisely scaled model airplanes for the armed forces. Teachers have trained over 6,000,000 workers for war industries and have given more than 38,000,000 hours to selective service and rationing registrations, all of which was given without additional compensation and half of which was overtime. In many cities, they have taken the lead in training civilian defense classes.

Labor has recognized the extent and importance of these contributions and has fought valiantly, though in many cases unsuccessfully, to strengthen our public schools during this period. It does not agree with Senator Robert Taft (Ohio), who said recently on the floor of the Senate, "Nothing which we can do in regard to education will in any way affect the conduct of the war."

It realizes that a strengthened public school system can contribute much to the writing of the kind of peace for which the war is presumably being fought.

### **Boards of Education**

In the United States, almost all public schools are controlled by boards of education which are either elected or appointed by public officials. These boards determine, for the most part, the policies of our public schools. They select teaching and administrative personnel. They decide whether children shall study from textbooks which deal honestly and vigorously with current problems, or whether these books shall be barred



from the schools. They decide whether the school shall be responsible for developing an intelligent attitude toward minority groups, by acknowledging their valuable contributions to our way of life, or whether the prejudices and superstitions of the adult community shall be passed along to children. They decide whether teachers shall be free to join labor unions, civil liberties committees, and other anti-fascist groups, or whether membership in such organizations imperils "objectivity" and "fairness" in teaching. They decide whether the schools shall be used by adult groups for forum discussions of the social, economic and political issues which affect our national life, and whether films and pamphlets dealing with these issues shall be made available through the schools. They decide, in short, the standard of education for the community. Labor can be of great help in guiding these important decisions toward the side of progress and democracy.

Four scholarly studies indicate just how much chance labor has had to do this:

In a study published in *School and Society*, January 20, 1937, it was found that out of 967 school board members in 104 cities, 75% were either business or professional men, while labor supplied only 4% or 39 members. In George S. Counts' study, "The



Social Composition of Boards of Education, 3% of the 6,390 school board members were drawn from labor. W. W. Ludeman, in the *American School Board Journal* of February, 1939, found that in South Dakota more than 70% of the 300 board members came from business, banking and the professions while labor was represented by less than 3%. If farm owners and retired farmers are included, the percentage of business and professional representation increases to 95%. The fourth study, covering 1,025 school board members in 205 of the 298 high school districts in California, was made by James L. Snell in his unpublished M.A. thesis at Stanford University (1938). He reports six times as many representatives of proprietary, professional and managerial groups as of labor. The inclusion of farm owners raises his figure to 73% for those representing property interests as against 6% for labor groups.

Packing school boards is as dangerous to democracy as packing the legislature. One group of the population cannot legislate for another. Neither can one type of group satisfactorily govern our public education. Members from comparatively privileged economic



groups may conceivably bring to a school board the best of intentions; they cannot bring a complete knowledge of the needs and problems of all the elements in the population. Our one-sided educational policy was soundly criticized by Dr. Floyd W. Reeves in a broadcast of the University of Chicago Round Table on "What Should We Teach Our Youth Now." He said:

"There are certain very important things in our social, economic and political life that we hardly touch upon in our public schools—such things as the organization of labor unions and consumer cooperatives. I know of only one state in the United States that has any systematic program of instruction in the cooperative movement; and I don't know of any state that has systematic instruction with reference to the organization of the workers of this nation. It seems to me that that is a very definite type of citizenship training that ought to be given in our public schools."

Since the public schools of America are one of the greatest influences on the social attitude and thinking of the boys and girls of today, the workers of tomorrow, labor requires its fair share of representatives on boards of education. To have this, organized labor will have to enter politics on the local level—nominate and elect its friends to boards of education, or nominate and elect a mayor who will appoint labor members to the board, in proportion to labor's membership in the community.

It is also essential that labor interest itself in the com-





position of the boards of trustees which administer our state universities and teacher training institutions. University facilities should be as well adapted to the educational requirements of labor as they have been to management. Special schools giving courses in economics, labor law and trade union history to labor leaders should not be necessary. University extension divisions should be encouraged to reach out into the entire community and organize courses in workers' education, health, nutrition, child care, etc. Liberal teachers' colleges, friendly to labor, are bound to graduate more open-minded teachers. Fair-minded, adequately paid faculty members will be less apt to sell their research talents to monopolistic business enterprise, and more able to truly teach young people.

### Textbook and Curriculum Content

There will be no free world and no free labor movement unless the boys and girls of America are brought up to believe firmly in freedom and to understand its responsibilities. Curriculum and textbook content hold an important place in the development of citizen attitudes. The National Association of Manufacturers recognizes this and has a textbook committee to examine social studies, history, economics and civics texts and to prepare study helps, movies and lectures for free distribution to the schools and colleges of America. Quite naturally, this committee protests the content of "liberal" texts.

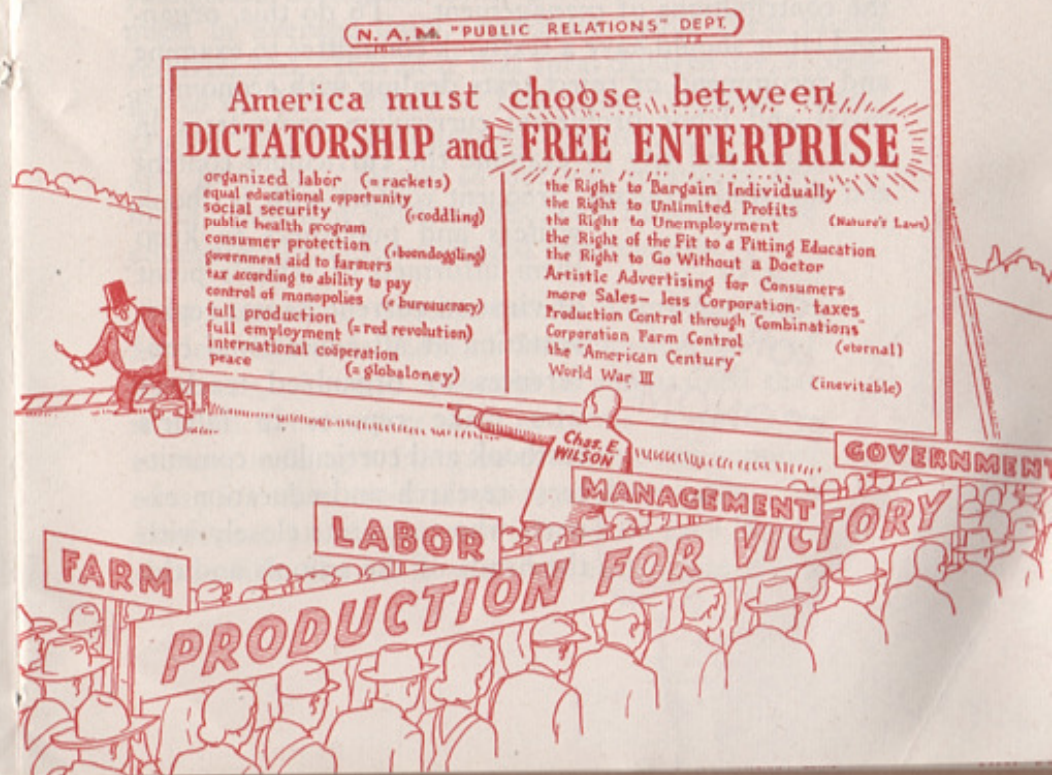
Long before there was a single piece of material for public school use available from the labor movement, the NAM was "feeding" its free pamphlet materials to apparently unsuspecting teachers. By 1937 the NAM's "adult education" had begun in earnest; in

that year, Robert Brady of the University of California estimates, the NAM spent \$36,000,000 on "public relations." Since then Professor Brady estimates that the sum has been doubled. This does not take into account the "tax-supported" deluge of institutional advertising which has had a tremendous increase since the war started. One ad which opened with the gag line, "Why don't you read me a story any more, daddy?", took two-thirds of a newspaper page to explain that "daddy" was all tired out from "post-war planning" trying to save enough out of taxes to provide jobs for returning soldiers.

The anti-democratic propaganda which has characterized much of the NAM program was challenged

"... but I tell you frankly that I am deeply alarmed today over the possibility that a right-wing reaction may draw some sections of capital so far away from our traditions as to imperil the entire structure of American life as we know it."

—Charles E. Wilson at the annual meeting of the N.A.M.



"FREE" MOVIES

"FREE" PAMPHLETS

"FREE" SPEAKERS

"FREE" RECORDINGS, RADIO PROGRAMS



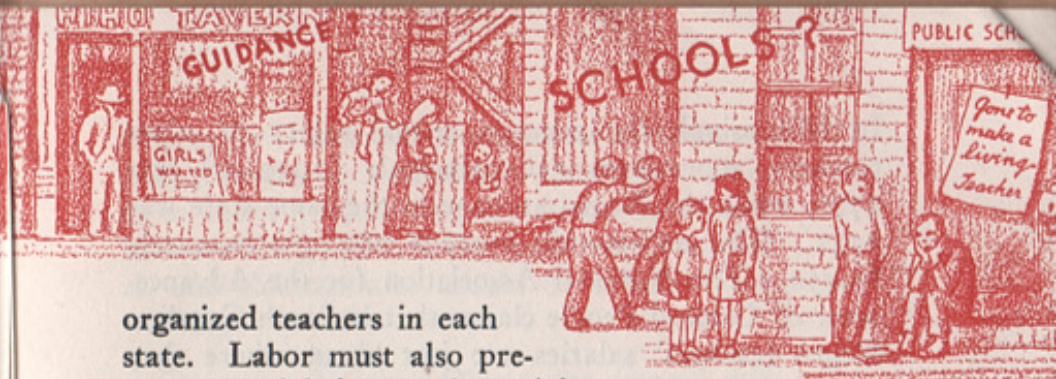


recently by one of America's foremost business leaders, Charles E. Wilson, president of General Electric and vice president of the War Production Board, when he warned the annual meeting of the NAM against "right-wing reaction."

The powerful Illinois Farm Bureau, leader of the conservative "farm bloc", has set up a state-wide school committee to protect its own special interests.

In order for organized labor to cultivate a belief in and understanding of true freedom for all people, it must see to it that its contribution to American civilization and institutions are given space in the texts and time in the course of study comparable to that given to the contributions of management. To do this, organized labor should have a textbook committee to examine and recommend or reject texts dealing with economics, social and labor problems; curriculum committees in each state and city to examine the curriculum content and the study courses; frequent contact with textbook

writers and publishers to keep them informed of labor's point of view on current issues; representation at all educational conferences by organized teachers who make reports to labor's textbook and curriculum committees; research and education experts who cooperate closely with the heads of the schools and the

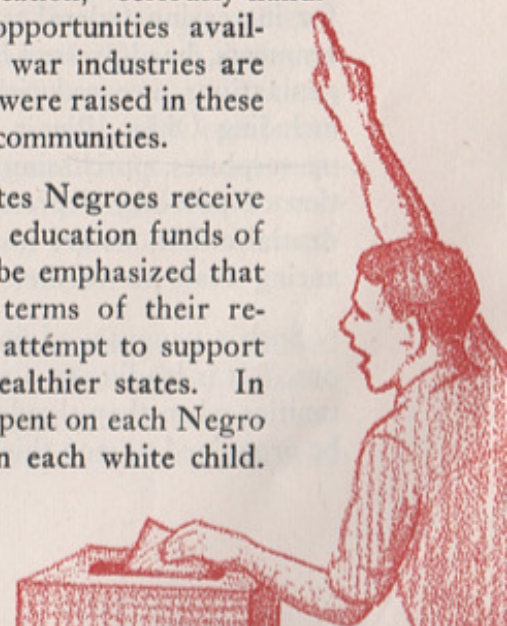


organized teachers in each state. Labor must also prepare material for use in social studies classes, especially in high schools.

### Equal Educational Opportunity

There can be no question that our schools do not educate equally all youth regardless of race, creed or color. Closely related to this problem is the spread between educational opportunities offered rural and urban youth. In 1939-40, for instance, the average rural teacher received just half the salary of an urban teacher, or \$967 as compared with \$1,937. Urban youngsters during the same period received \$105 per pupil in average daily attendance, while rural pupils received \$70. It is clear that rural children are, according to the U. S. Office of Education, "seriously handicapped . . . in educational opportunities available to them." Many of our war industries are being manned by workers who were raised in these educationally underprivileged communities.

In most of our southern states Negroes receive far less than their share of the education funds of the states, although it should be emphasized that most of these states are, in terms of their resources, making a far greater attempt to support education than most of our wealthier states. In Louisiana, \$12.62 per year is spent on each Negro child while \$61.21 is spent on each white child.





In Mississippi, the average annual salary of white teachers, supervisors and principals (1939-40) was \$776, while the Negro average in the same state was \$232. The nation-wide average was approximately \$1,450. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People claims that in South Carolina Negro teachers' salaries are just about where they were 50 years ago.

In some states, civics textbooks are edited especially for Negro students; the material dealing with the right to vote and the mechanics of voting is carefully omitted. A recent study of history and other texts showed that even the most "liberal" books have failed to give any minimum understanding of the development of Negro life in the United States since the Civil War.

### **Educational Curtailment**

Public education in America, including state universities and teachers' colleges, is almost entirely supported by state and local taxes. In order to compensate for increasing federal taxes, many state and local governments, hard-pressed by real estate and taxpayer organizations, are reducing local taxes. Several states, including Ohio, Illinois, and New York, are building up surpluses, purchasing government bonds in anticipation of post-war depressions. (Governors with presidential ambitions are not above using their budget-balancing feats to further their aims.)

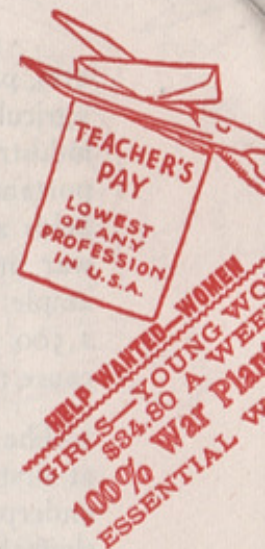
Such a program of financial retrenchment is dangerous. It is leading to a reduction of educational opportunities when they should be expanded. Pressure must be organized to stop this trend. We are already begin-

ning to feel the social consequences of the war: delinquency is up from nine to sixteen percent in cities above 500,000 in population; child labor laws are being violated, law enforcement winked at, and children who should be in school are working.

Governor Thomas Dewey cut several million dollars from state aid for the New York state schools. The New York city schools have labored under a teacher shortage for some time and the number of students per class has been steadily rising. In other large cities there is a shocking lack of elementary school teachers and almost no substitute teachers.

Reports from every part of the country show that millions of children are suffering severely from this situation. There are between 7,500 and 10,000 classrooms in the United States that have no teachers. There were less than 1,000 vacant classrooms at the time of Pearl Harbor. In 1940-41 only 2,300 war "emergency" certificates were issued to teachers with below standard qualifications. In 1942-43, 38,000 "emergency" certificates were issued. During the 1944 school year it is quite possible that more than 2,000,000 pupils will have as teachers people who could not meet teaching standards in normal times. Last year approximately 170,000 teachers changed their positions or moved to non-teaching jobs. This is more than twice the normal rate of turn-over.

Educational losses caused by a lack of qualified teachers can rarely be made up. Thousands of classes in which essential subjects were taught have been discontinued. Most of these classes were in industrial





arts, physical education, mathematics, business subjects, agriculture, home economics, chemistry, trades and industries. These subjects for the most part are important not only for peacetime workers in factories, fields and homes, but also for soldiers and workers in war industries and other war-related fields. One example is vocational agriculture, in which more than 1,500 departments of instruction are now closed because teachers cannot be found.

The closing of schools for lack of teachers seemed at first to be the special problem of rural areas and underprivileged towns of the south. It seemed unthinkable to most people in northern cities that the exodus of teachers would touch them and their children. Yet recently, in a wealthy suburb fringing one of the largest cities in the land, in a community noted for its fine homes, its cultural advantages, its great university whose distinguished School of Education has long prepared teachers for the four corners of America, the unthinkable happened. Children had been sent home from school because there were no teachers. Three classrooms stood empty. Other classes were forced to double up. A college student was brought in to teach still another class. A kindergarten group was met with a bewildering succession of four different teachers in as many months. This was no forgotten town of the deep south. This was a suburb of Chicago.



## Teacher Security

The chief cause of teachers leaving their profession has been the slow increase in salaries. The average salary for all teachers in 1942-43 was approximately \$1,550. Ten thousand teachers, during the same year, received less than \$300 per year, 66,000 received less than \$600, while 360,000 received less than \$1,200. Twenty-eight states paid their teachers an average weekly wage of \$25 or less.

In October, 1943, the U. S. Senate debated S.637 which was reported out of the Labor and Education Committee favorably. The bill would have provided \$200,000,000 for emergency salary increases for teachers, and \$100,000,000 for equalizing educational opportunity in the United States. Led by Senator Robert Taft (Ohio), the group opposing the bill succeeded in getting a "trick" amendment to it, and the bill was then recommitted to the Committee. Several weeks later, the National Opinion Research of Denver, Colorado, announced that eight out of ten Americans favored federal aid for schools. In the meantime, American children had lost something precious: the right to the kind of educational opportunity and equality about which we are prone to boast. In December, 1943, the teachers of Great Britain were greeted with their second "war bonus" as follows: Women, under 21, 26 pounds per year; 21 or over, 42 pounds per year; Men, under 21, 32 pounds; 21 or over, 52 pounds. Payment of the bonus began January 1, 1944.

Teachers should be encouraged to join their own unions in order to secure for themselves the rights,

IT'S PROPAGANDA!







privileges and conditions which prevail, through collective bargaining, in other kinds of work. Their ability to interpret the labor movement fairly and to open class discussion to controversial issues, depends partly on their personal participation in affairs outside the classroom.

### Program for Action

If we would solve the complicated problems of our rapidly changing modern world, it is imperative that the public schools be used for adults as well as for children. The schoolhouse and the physical equipment in it belong to all the people in the community and should be put to full use.

The 1940 census showed that "there are three times as many 'functional illiterates' in the United States over the age of 25 as there are college graduates." Somewhere between the illiterate and the college graduate, are the millions of people who desire adult education of one sort or another. School auditoriums should be available for labor and other meetings of public interest.

The public school plant should be kept open twelve months per year, with recreational facilities—gyms, swimming pools, playgrounds and auditoriums—always available to the boys and girls. There should be a coordination of the recreational program of city parks and playgrounds with that of the schools; and a further coordination of urban school programs with those of rural schools, county agents, and directors of 4-H clubs. Vocational guidance and other personnel service should be expanded for the benefit of our future citizens.

To meet our war manpower requirements, more mothers of young children will have to go to work. There is a great need for more nursery schools for pre-school children, and supervision for children of school age. Organized labor should form local committees to survey each community to determine the number of women working and children needing care; to secure Lanham Act fund grants; to support all bills for federal aid, such as the Thomas-Hill Bill and the Ramspeck Bill, aiming to equalize educational opportunity for the duration of the war; to support federal aid legislation as a permanent program; to watch the voting record of their congressmen and senators and to insist that their elected representatives support these progressive educational bills.



Our boys and girls are our greatest single national resource. Parents and teachers together, through PTA groups, union membership and other community and political activities, must protect and develop a nation-wide public school system which will add dignity and security to the teaching profession while serving the best interests of American youth.



## FACTS FOR ACTION

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK (Monthly Survey)  
FOR THE NATION'S SECURITY  
POLITICAL PRIMER FOR ALL AMERICANS  
AS WE WIN  
LABOR AND EDUCATION  
GOOD SHELTER for Everyone  
STEEL FIGHTS FOR THE NATION



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**To the Teachers of America:**

The boys and girls who yesterday studied in your classrooms are serving today on the scattered battlefronts of the world. Many of them will be called upon to give their lives for our way of life. Freedom of speech, of religion, freedom from want and from fear are not mere abstractions to these young people. To them, freedom of speech means the fair-minded discussions in your classrooms; freedom of religion—the little white churches in a thousand villages; freedom from want—a wife, children and a job at a living wage; and freedom from fear—a world based on justice and equal opportunity for all, irrespective of class, color or creed.

While these soldier boys of ours are fighting and dying for a better world, the one million teachers of America have a great responsibility: The task of keeping alive within the heart of every school child the ideals of democracy. This period of history challenges you as never before to serve the democratic interests of all the people, to shun the selfish interests of the vested few, and thus to help bring about the age of the common man.

*Philip Murray*  
President, C.I.O.

